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DE RUEHSQ #0214/01 1321823
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 121823Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY SKOPJE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8234
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE 0524

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000214

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

FOR THE DEPUTY SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR REEKER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [GR](#) [KV](#) [MK](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR THE DEPUTY SECRETARY'S VISIT TO MACEDONIA

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) Your visit presents an opportune moment to underscore to Macedonians that the Obama Administration is not "pro-Greek," that the United States is prepared to engage in active behind-the-scenes support for developing a reasonable solution to the name dispute -- working with BOTH sides -- and that we expect better performance from the Gruevski government on building a genuinely multiethnic, democratic, law-based society.

Key points to make:

--It is time for real negotiations on the name issue, to replace FYROM with something acceptable and to work out a deal on the remaining details. The identity that the United States sees at stake here is Macedonia's identity as a full member of the Euro-Atlantic community.

-- The United States wants to help you achieve this goal this year but we can only do so with your active involvement. I understand you doubt Greek willingness to conclude a deal, but I need your pledge to test that doubt by negotiating seriously.

-- The U.S. is seeking to support the UN process, not replace it.

-- Significantly greater progress on reaching modern European standards on interethnic relations, rule of law, and political dialogue is critical to Macedonia's future. Well-functioning democratic practices and good governance will produce the stability and prosperity that all your citizens want.

Additional objectives/points:

--Thank Gruevski for his positive approach to Kosovo (recognition, support for IMF membership) and urge formal diplomatic relations ASAP.

--Reconfirm the GoM's commitment to send an additional 50-75 troops to Afghanistan with the Vermont National Guard in late 2009/early 2010.

Gruevski in Control

¶2. (SBU) Your visit comes as PM Nikola Gruevski and his VMRO party have consolidated almost complete political control: VMRO controls an outright majority in parliament, the Presidency, and 56 of 85 municipal governments following 2008 parliamentary elections and March/April 2009 presidential and local elections. Gruevski will not have to face the voters again until 2012, (though he may be tempted to call early elections again), and now has a clear opportunity to tackle the name dispute with Greece. The Alliance reaffirmed Macedonia's readiness to join NATO -- pending resolution on

the name issue -- at the Strasbourg-Kehl summit, and President Obama's statement gave the always-insecure Macedonians (of all ethnicities) reassurance of U.S. support. But Gruevski must understand that this deadlock cannot continue in perpetuity.

Getting to Yes on the Name Issue

13. (SBU) The Bucharest outcome was a psychologically devastating blow to Macedonia's fragile confidence. Following the summit, Gruevski called early elections, indulged in anti-Greek rhetoric, and pursued other follies bound to annoy Athens, such as suing them at the ICJ, sending multiple letters to world leaders, naming roads and other public spaces after Philip of Macedon and Alexander the Great, and unveiling plans to build an enormous (22 meter) statue of Alexander in the center of Skopje. Gruevski admitted to me six months ago that he "may have been wrong" in his strategy to "remind everyone that the Greeks pay a price too." He is reluctant to acknowledge publicly, however, that his actions have gained him nothing but ill will in Washington and European capitals. In keeping with his pledge to me, he calmed down his own public statements (though he has failed to reel in his Foreign Minister, Antonio Milososki).

14. (SBU) Gruevski, his VMRO party faithful, and many others in the press, have recently emphasized that any deal on the name must "preserve our identity as Macedonians," claiming that the Greeks want "to change our language and our nationality." The trouble is that it is next to impossible that the GoG would ever agree to a document that would define

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the citizens of this country as "Macedonians" or the language as "Macedonian." If negotiations actually progress, this issue may prove the sticking point. I recommend that you tell Gruevski that we are sympathetic on this question, but in the end an agreed name and its scope of use may have to be the sole focus of any agreement. "Diplomatic finesse" is a concept seemingly alien to Macedonians.

Close the Deal on Kosovo Relations

15. (SBU) At our urging, Macedonia finally recognized Kosovo as an independent state in October, but Gruevski has refused to establish formal diplomatic ties with Pristina pending final demarcation of their mutual border. The two sides are nearly there, and the GoK has offered a territorial offset (involving around 100 hectares of remote land) in order to avoid having some querulous Kosovars owning land on the Macedonian side of the border. Gruevski is considering this, but believes that for complex legal reasons he must take the issue to parliament, which he is reluctant to do (despite the fact that he controls a majority of the seats and his ethnic Albanian coalition partner, DUI, wants a deal now). While thanking Gruevski for voting yes on Kosovo's IMF/World Bank membership bid, you should urge him to close this matter ASAP.

More Help for ISAF

16. (SBU) Macedonia has been a serious ally on the international security front, sending troops to both Iraq and Afghanistan since the beginning. (Their troops left Iraq at the end of 2008, with the expiration of UNSCR 1790.) Macedonia has 168 troops in Afghanistan and told us in our bilateral defense review last December that it would send an additional 50-75 troops to serve for one year with the Vermont National Guard contingent deploying late this year or in early 2010. You should ask Gruevski for his firm commitment to this plan.

Concerns on Interethnic Relations, Rule of Law, and Political Dialogue

17. (SBU) The ethnic Albanian community is increasingly discontented, and murmurs of separatism are starting to grow. Ethnic Albanians are concerned that Gruevski is running away from Euro-Atlantic integration by refusing to negotiate meaningfully on the name issue. This concern is compounded by Gruevski's lack of interest in interethnic relations or in full implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), which -- with heavy U.S. involvement -- ended the brief civil conflict in 2001. Ministers from DUI, the largest e-Albanian party and Gruevski's coalition partner, are increasingly complaining that they are marginalized in the government and not treated as equal partners. E-Albanians were deeply unhappy with VMRO's presidential candidate (now President) Gjorge Ivanov, who opposed the OFA and who made no attempt to reach out to e-Albanian voters in his campaign. This anger is now compounded by Gruevski's plan to build a large Orthodox Christian church -- with taxpayer money -- on Skopje's main square; such a move is not only insensitive to the e-Albanians, but also a questionable use of resources even as the economic situation has compelled the GoM to cut its budget by 6.2%, including an 18% cut in defense.

18. (SBU) Political dialogue and rule of law -- key EU benchmarks as well as issues of importance to us -- are on the decline. Problems include excessive pretrial detention, a corrupt and pressured judiciary, inadequate parliamentary deliberation of government initiatives. Even by Macedonia's standards, Gruevski rarely reaches across the aisle nor even to his e-Albanian coalition partner on issues large or small, preferring ad hominem attacks to genuine discussion. Government ministers and officials regularly interfere in the judiciary. A 200 million Euro judgment against Austrian electricity distributor EVN followed a trial chock full of irregularities, despite the presence of international observers. This cannot help but have a chilling effect on foreign investment as well.

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